

REMARKS

The above-noted cancellation of claims 1-~~10~~⁴ and addition of new claims ~~11-59~~^{5 52}, as well as the submission of a new Abstract and revisions to the Specification, are respectfully submitted prior to initiation of the prosecution of this application in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

The above-noted new claims are respectfully submitted in order to more clearly and appropriately claim the subject matter which applicant considers to constitute his inventive contribution. No new matter is included in these amendments. In addition, the revisions to the Abstract and Specification are submitted in order to clarify and correct the Abstract and Specification and to conform them to all of the requirements of U.S. practice. No new matter is included in these amendments.

In view of the above, it is respectfully requested that these amendments now be entered, and that prosecution on the merits of this application now be initiated. If, however, for any reason the Examiner does not believe such action can be taken, it is respectfully requested that the Examiner telephone applicant's attorney at (908) 654-5000 in order to overcome any objections which the Examiner may have.


Application No. 09/937,259

Docket No.: ALBIHN W 3.3-420

If there are any additional charges in connection with this requested amendment, the Examiner is authorized to charge applicant's Deposit Account No. 12-1095 therefor.

Respectfully submitted,

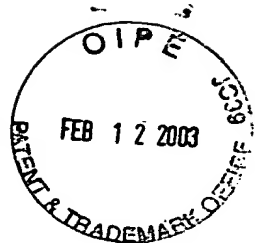
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TITLE:

~~THIS INVENTION RELATES TO A METHOD OF AND SYSTEM FOR
COMPUTER-CONTROLLED DISTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION VIA MULTIPLE A
NUMBER OF DIFFERENT ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS AND
SYSTEM FOR THE APPLICATION OF THE METHOD.~~

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] ~~TECHNICAL FIELD:~~ This invention relates to a method ~~for~~
of computer-controlled distribution of information via a
number of different alternative communication systems and to a
system for the application of the method.

[0002] ~~CURRENT TECHNOLOGY:~~ ~~For~~ The transmission of documents
~~information~~ between different parties, such as between
different companies or between companies and private
individuals, ~~there are principally two distribution systems~~
~~available, namely is typically carried out via letter the post~~
~~office and or via electronic document transmission such as via~~
~~by fax or e-mail. Particularly within the business community~~
~~there~~ There is, however, a desire to limit the use of letter
post as much as possible, as it particularly within the
business community, results in because of the extensive amount
of paper handling and paper consumption of paper, not only for
documents but also for envelopes. At the same time, postal
charges are high and the postal service is relatively slow
and, sometimes, rather unreliable. As an alternative, By the
use of fax, transmission reduces paper handling, is reduced
and the information reaches the recipient very quickly. In
addition, the sender can obtain confirmation that the
information has arrived.

[0003] As a further alternative, E-mail offers even greater
benefits. To a certain extent the transmission of information
can occur take place completely without the use of paper, such
as when if the information is written to into computer memory
on at the premises of the sender and is transferred to the
recipient and read off on the recipient's computer monitor,

thereby enabling the recipient to decide whether the message is to be stored electronically, stored on paper, or not stored at all. An advantage of unique to e-mail is that the electronically-stored information can be used edited by both either the sender and or the recipient, for editing, for or transferring-transferred completely or in part to a store storage medium or to working files so that it the information can be used for data processing.

[0004] ~~In spite of the fact that~~ Though electronic communication has ~~many~~ considerable advantages when compared to letter post, the latter is still greatly used to a great extent, particularly not only for private mail, as is to be expected, but also for outgoing mail from companies that which, however, usually typically have the equipment available for electronic communication.

[0005] ~~From US-A-U.S. Patent No. 5-, 513-, 126~~ (Harkins et al) describes a is known an network using electronic communication channels, the The network being is provided to change the information transmitted by from a sender according to a communication profile established by the recipient. The invention presupposes that the sender and the recipient are subscribers of the network and being are equipped with devices for electronic communications. The invention, however, provides has no relevance incentive to a providing a facilitating to parties that using use correspondence by mail to change to electronic communication.

[0006] There are several reasons ~~for that~~ electronic communication is only being used to a limited extent ~~in despite such of the~~ equipment being available. There ~~will probably always be~~ One reason is that some documents which are only suitable for physical conveyance, in particular namely, original material, such as signed legal documents, and also or material distributed at with a large volume, such as books and other extensive printed material. One Another reason which should, however, be able to be largely eliminated is the uncertainly on the part of the sender as to whether the

recipient has the facilities to receive and handle electronically transmitted information and, if so, by what means and to what address. ~~On the other hand practically~~ By contrast, virtually every imaginable contact has a known postal address, ~~which means so~~ that the postal service is mostly used as a necessity for ~~much~~ correspondence. For example, authorities and institutions such as banks regularly use the postal services for sending messages, injunctions, transaction confirmations, account communications and, in particular, ~~for~~ invoices. Thus, In in spite of all its advantages, ~~the~~ relatively widespread use of electronic communication is limited to messages between companies and other parties between in which there is close interaction and a frequent exchange of information.

[0007] It is therefore advantageous to ~~the case that within~~ companies, institutions and authorities ~~great gains could be made if to replace their use of the postal service with was to be replaced by~~ electronic communication whenever it was possible. ~~to do so.~~ The gains would not only be realized ~~just lie in the actual service being rationalized mechanized and having the least possible manual involvement but also in that the information may being able to be produced by the sender in a considerably more rational mechanized way than when using the postal service and can in particular in the fact that it would be able to be used by the recipient directly as an input for further processing and storage.~~ whereas By contrast, data from paper documents must often be transferred manually into a digital form before it ~~they~~ can be worked on. This is particularly ~~marked where~~ important for accounting operations ~~is concerned,~~ as most companies ~~today~~ presently do their bookkeeping, ledger entries and financial reports by means of data processing systems using computers. ~~It is therefore necessary for~~ Thus, paper documents such as invoices, bank statements, etc, ~~to~~ must be entered manually in order to be integrated ~~in~~ into the data processing systems.

~~DESCRIPTION~~ SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION÷

[0008] ~~This~~ The invention ~~concerns a method for~~ provides computer-controlled selection of distribution paths for information of various kinds produced on the premises of a sender ~~in such a way that~~ the best available distribution path is selected. ~~The invention also concerns a communication and process system for the implementation of the method.~~

[0009] ~~The intended~~ iInformation is produced in data form on the premises of ~~the~~ a sender and is transferred to a "distribution exchange", which independently analyses the information with respect to the reception address and type, and based on ~~the basis of~~ the analysis, selects, the best communication path ~~to be used and thereafter is responsible for controls~~ the distribution. The method and the system for its implementation create many opportunities both on the premises of the sender and the recipient for high-level mechanization ~~rationalization~~ of the production and further processing of the information.

[0010] ~~Another important advantage of~~ tThe invention also ~~is that it~~ provides a high level of security against incorrect processing of the data, both on the premises of the sender and of the recipient. Similarly, high security ~~is achieved~~ against incorrect addressing and against siphoning off of information to unauthorized parties is attained.

[0011] ~~An~~ aAdditionally, ~~and very important advantage is that~~ the system can be introduced and utilized on the premises of the user without ~~requiring any~~ extensive installation, ~~work,~~ and much of the work involved in ~~the form~~ the entry of ~~entering~~ basic data, utilizing ~~utilization of~~ new computer programs and training of personnel can be eliminated by ~~use of~~ the method and system of ~~according to~~ the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES+DRAWINGS

[0012] ~~In the following~~ tThe method and system ~~according of~~ to the invention will be ~~are~~ described with reference to the attached drawings which show the system schematically ~~diagrammatically~~.

[0013] Figure 1 shows a functional block diagram of the a system which regarding its function for production produces and distribution distributes of information on the premises of the sender in accordance with the invention; and

[0014] Figure 2 shows a functional eorresponding block diagram regarding the function of the a corresponding system for the reception of that receives the information distributed by the system of Figure 12.

PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0015] ~~In the following t~~The method and system of the invention are first described in a mode of with reference to an application aimed initially for distributing accounting information with and associated correspondence within a company or institution. Below are listed various the most important processes and the documents associated with these within such an accounting system and various documents used by such a system.

[0016] I. The debiting procedure:

1. Production of basic debiting data based on the basis of recorded deliveries, work carried out, etc.
2. Determination Generation of debiting data including:
 - a) addressee,
 - b) specification,
 - c) amount, and
 - d) terms.
3. Internal recording of the debiting data for the drawing up of:
 - a) ledgers,
 - b) payment follow-up, and
 - c) financial reporting.
4. Production of invoices in ~~the a~~ form determined by the method of distribution. (~~see See~~ 5 below).
5. Distribution of the invoices in accordance with using any of the following methods:
 - a) the postal services,
 - b) ~~by~~ fax transmission,

- c) by e-mail outputted via and a printer located on the premises of the recipient, and
- d) direct electronic transmission of data to ~~the~~ a data processing system located on the premises of the recipient in accordance with ~~the~~ agreed addressing.

[0017] II. The reception process:

- 1. Arrival of invoice/invoicing data via:
 - a) the postal ~~service~~ service,
 - b) fax transmission,
 - c) e-mail ~~via and a printer, or~~
 - d) direct input of data into the recipient's data system in accordance with ~~the~~ agreed addressing.
- 2. Sorting of correspondence ~~by~~ based on its content such as:
 - a) payment instructions, ~~for example such as~~ invoices, and demands for fees;
 - b) ~~reporting reports~~ of financial data concerning payments made, payments received, balances, etc.;
 - c) other finance-related correspondence, ~~for example~~ such as queries concerning invoices issued, requests for quotes, orders, and messages concerning payment difficulties;
 - d) correspondence not related to finances but which ~~is to result in~~ require action, ~~for such as example~~ injunctions, and demands from the an authorities authority, or other correspondence with a fixed reply deadline; and
 - e) correspondence not related to finances, ~~but~~ of a general and informative nature.
- 3. Internal distribution of the incoming correspondence in accordance with ~~its~~ one of the above classifications: ~~(II.2 a-e)~~

~~Classification in accordance with (2)~~

- a, b) Correspondence determined to be within the above classifications 2a) and 2b) is ~~To~~ to be recorded as financial data in the internal accounting system which is typically assumed to be computer-based;
- b) correspondence determined to be within the above classification 2c) is to be distributed internally to the department/ or person responsible for the sector to which the matter; is related
- cd) for correspondence determined to be under the above classification 2d), the deadline is to be noted and the communication is to be distributed to the person responsible for responding to party within the sector to which the action refers; and
- de) messages with possible relevance to the current business activity are to be distributed to the departments/persons concerned, for information and possible action.

[0018] Thus, As can be seen, after sorting, the finance-related correspondence (classifications 2a, and 2b) can be recorded in the recipient's computer-based accounting system and results in with relatively little manual processing. Other correspondence (such as classifications 2c, 2d, and 2e) can not be automatically handled rationalized to the same extent, but practically always requires personal consideration and action. However, computer-based tools such as checking and memory functions, word-processing, etc., can be used.

[0019] III. Processes initiated brought about by the incoming correspondence include:

1. Payment processes, which after the arrival of the an invoice or other payment demand and its has been recorded recording in a computer-based accounting system can may be paid automatically via a bank, a bank check or transfer giro or a postal giro check

~~using by a computer means of correct programming program.~~

2. Financial reporting, ~~which for a well-developed computer-based accounting system, using can be produced by means of a suitable computer program.~~
3. Following up of financial reports ~~after examination. Can that may~~ result in the redistribution of funds, taking up or payment of loans, reorganization of certain business activities and other measures ~~which in general fall under the area of responsibility of the management- for which Computercomputer-based tools can only be used to a limited extent.~~
4. Correspondence not related to finance ~~or - Ffinancial management activity which are controlled by computer can only be used for certain activities with having well-established, frequently used routines which may are used frequently. However, in general there is a need for additional computer-based tools.~~

[0020] As shown by the above list, there ~~are is~~ a great need ~~opportunities to mechanize rationalize~~ the debiting procedure (I) ~~using by means of computer-based data processing.~~ The first precondition for using such computer-based data processing is this ~~it that~~ the sender has access to a computer-based accounting system and to suitable computer programs. ~~for the requisite processes. This is~~ Such access is available to the case for large companies, and to an ever increasing extent ~~also for to smaller companies, and but~~ is always available the case for companies and institutions with extensive financial management tasks, such as banks, insurance companies and certain authorities. However, the distribution (I.5) of invoices and other payment demands has not been fully ~~rationalized mechanized as there the distribution is a dependence depends~~ upon the reception capabilities of the recipient and the sender's knowledge of ~~thesethe~~ the recipients.

[0021] For received correspondence (II) there is similarly a dependence upon the ~~correspondence~~ medium used by the sender which, and, as mentioned above, a sender may will often not use be the most ~~rational mechanized~~ distribution channel due to uncertainty about regarding the available availability of various means of distribution. ~~This means of course that t~~The form of the received correspondence is ~~determined~~ likewise affected by this uncertainty. If ~~the~~ distribution takes place in a less ~~rational mechanized~~ way which is not based on electronic methods, ~~this also has an adverse effect on the opportunities for rationalizing the the possibility of mechanizing the sorting (II.2) and also affects the recording operations using in the computer-based accounting system (II.3, a and b) is also adversely affected, so that there can must be only a manual implementation involvement. When recording in the accounting system has been carried out, the subsequent accounting measures (III.1, and 2) can be carried out ~~rationally intelligently~~ if the accounting system is so designed ~~for this.~~~~

[0022] Accounting systems within companies and institutions ~~is~~ are intrinsically well suited to computer-aided mechanization, as rationalization, which is also shown by the fact that such mechanization being rationalization has been introduced relatively quickly and widely within ~~the~~ financial sector. As can be seen from the above, the main obstacle to optimal mechanization rationalization ~~is~~ the lack of automation rationalization ~~of~~ the distribution of the finance-related correspondence. Another obstacle, particularly for related to smaller companies, is a lack of investment of funds and time for ~~the~~ setting up ~~of~~ a well-developed mechanized accounting system.

[0023] ~~Even t~~Though accounting systems are described herein ~~has been mentioned as an area well-suited to the utilization of the invention, this does not exclude there being the invention is likewise applicable to other areas where repeated~~

routines occur. ~~Examples of~~ Such areas include ~~are~~ the booking of tickets and the ordering of goods.

[0024] Other sent and received types of correspondence, which ~~is~~ are not based on set repeatable routines ~~such as~~ those used in relating to accounting are, does not provide the same opportunities for ~~rationalization~~ mechanization but requires a considerable degree of personal decision-taking making and action. Here, it will largely continue to be necessary to ~~be satisfied with utilizing~~ utilize the available mechanization tools, ~~in the rationalization process~~, such as computer-based information systems, computer-based management tools, etc. However, even here, ~~an important rationalization factor can be the fact that rational~~ mechanized distribution ~~may be~~ is utilized. This is carried out to an ever increasing extent by fax transmission and by e-mail. However, ~~here the~~ restrictions also apply ~~originating from the fact that because~~ it is not known what reception options the recipient has, and thus for which reason the expensive and slow postal services ~~is often must be used~~.

[0025] ~~In the following~~ The system and method of according ~~to the invention, and the method in connection with this for the~~ as well as its implementation of ~~for~~ debiting procedures, will be described with. ~~Reference is made first to the block diagram shown in Figure 1.~~

[0026] ~~This~~ Figure 1 depicts a system comprising three main parts: a ~~the~~ sending party's unit 1, + shown above and to the left of the dotted line in the figure, an external service unit 2, shown (to the right of the dotted line), and the recipient's unit 3, (shown below the dotted line). The sender's unit 1 comprises one or more of ~~devices for which the following definitions apply:~~ a computer 4, a scanner 5, a server 6 including its requisite memory units, an accounting system 7, a printer 8, and a control unit 9 for correspondence and its distribution. Within the sender's unit 1 may there can be several of ~~each of~~ these devices. Alternatively, some of these units may can be omitted, whereas while other types of

~~device for data processing and storage devices may~~ can be included in their place. However, ~~it is necessary for there must to be at least one devices~~ for entering electronic data into the control device 9 and at least one printer 8 connected to this device. ~~Concerning t~~The accounting system 7 may alternatively , this can be designated as a function within the system and thus does not need not to be regarded as a separate hardware device. Rather, the accounting system ~~but~~ can be integrated into the rest of the data processing system as . ~~In this case the functions is to comprise such as the ability to enter financial data, store age and processing of this data, and output of the output data which is produced from the entered data material by means of the data processing.~~

[0027] The service unit 2 can be used by several sender's units 1 located on the premises of a companiesy or and institutions. The service unit is connected to control devices ~~in the connected units via connections 15,~~ which can be cable links or wireless connections but is and preferably a connection via a some available data network.

[0028] The service unit 2 comprises a data register 16 having with an advanced search function for searching and extracting particular data from a large quantity of stored data. A connection device 17 is connected to an the incoming connection 15 from the unit 1 and to a the data register 16 and also to outgoing connections 18, 19 and 20. In addition, it is assumed that the connection device 17 is connected to one or more computers 21 with monitors and keyboards that provide a for human interface.

[0029] The sender's unit 1 and the service unit 2 are intended designed for communication with to a number of recipients, which in the figure are represented by the units 3. These recipient units 3 can have different equipment for the reception of correspondence, such as an . ~~The different reception equipments which can occur are represented in Figure 1 by the following definitions: incoming postbox 25 for~~

receiving postal correspondence, a fax machine 26, a printer 27 connected to a computer for the reception-delivery of e-mail, and a data storage and a data processing device 28 for the reception of data using in accordance with special addressing and activation codifying. The Different-recipient units 3 can therefore have a greater or lesser degree of mechanization, ranging extent, from the case where it is only possible to use the postal services are used only for registered for documents up-based communication which is to be registered, to the case where there is a comprehensively developed system exists with a special addressing and activation functions in unit 28. Examples of sSuch functions include are-transfers between accounts in different banks where a codified remote message initiates triggers-the transactions using with-account entry and subsequent confirmation operations. The different extent of mechanization of the recipient units 3 on the premises of a the-respective prospective recipients is the cause of reason-for the above-mentioned uncertainty regarding which choice of means of distribution can be used-by the user.

[0030] As mentioned above, the service unit 2 is connected to the control device 9, which, in turn, is connected to receive for the reception of data produced in the data system of the sender's unit 1 and arranged to control the printer 8. The control device 9 is thereby arranged to transmits the received information via the line 15 to the control device 17 of the service unit 2 during breaks in the transmission of the same this data to the printer 8. The transmission to the service unit initiates a search process in the register unit 16. This is arranged to search for correspondences with for the identification addressee identifications included in data obtained from the control device 9 and, in particular, to locate the name and address information stored in the register unit 16, and if these do not contain relevant electronic address information, to search for such information.

[0031] The search process described above can result either in a relevant electronic address being found in from the identification data obtained from the control device 9 or from ~~by the search process register unit 16,~~ or the search process may result in no such data being found. If ~~there is an~~ electronic address is found, the service unit takes over the forwarding, which is carried out electronically via an the addressable data device 28, an e-mail system 27 or a fax system 26 in that order of priority. If no electronic address is ~~can be~~ found, the received data is returned to the control device 9 and forwarded to the printer 8, ~~which is activated to~~ print out the corresponding document for delivery by post.

[0032] Directory information stored in the service unit may ~~can be~~ obtained from a number of sources media such as telephone directories, fax directories, e-mail directories, official directories, etc., which are generally ~~are~~ available in digital form, and often by via CD-ROM. As much far as possible, each address is supplemented with an its address(es) suitable for electronic communication, such as may be delivered to ~~the~~ electronic addressing unit 28 using ~~with its~~ codes, or by using an e-mail address or fax number.

[0033] If no useable electronic address can be found, the correspondence is delivered ~~distribution~~ to the recipient's incoming postbox 25 by being generated by ~~must take place from~~ the sender unit's printer 8 and then sent via the normal postal service. In other words, the correspondence is in ~~question must be~~ printed out using the printer 8 and sent to the recipient by post as a letter. Alternatively, electronic ~~Other communication to the recipient, which is electronic,~~ is sent as mentioned above via the service unit 2. Accordingly, the fax system 26 is ~~shown~~ connected to the connection device 17 of the service unit 2 by the line 18, ~~via the printer-computer 27~~ is connected to the service unit 2 by the line 19, and ~~to the addressable computer device 28~~ is connected to the service unit 2 by the line 20. ~~Like the connection 15 these connections~~ can be made via a cable or by wireless

transmission and, preferably, by a means of some established data network.

[0034] As an example of the invention, a ~~In the function for the intended debiting procedure is implemented using the control device 9—constitutes a key element for the implementation of the method according to the invention. The control device 9, as described above, It is connected to the server 6 to receive for the reception of data in such a form that it can control the printer 8 for the printing out of documents. The Such documents may are assumed here to be invoices or other payment demands, which are produced in the sender's unit 1. Such production can be implemented in various ways, such as :—by manual entry of data via the computer 4, by scanning of documents using in the scanner 5 and/or by obtaining data received it—~~from the accounting system 7. The Sources of data to be entered in the accounting system may ~~can be of various kinds, such as delivery notes, work reports or and incoming debits from sub-suppliers, which may in turn can already be recorded in a form suitable for entry and can have been produced in the computer or scanner, for example. In addition the control unit 9 is connected to the printer 8 for the production of documents in such a form that they can be sent by post. As mentioned, the control device is connected to the service unit 2 and its connection device 17 by means of the connection 15.~~

~~For a debiting procedure the following operations are carried out:~~

[0035] The Entered data is then delivered from the server 6 to the control device 9 which is forwards the data ed via the connection 15 to the service unit 2 during a temporary break in the connection between from the control device 9 and to the printer 8. After entry, aRecipient addressing data incorporated in the produced and transmitted data quantity is then sent to the data register 16 for activation of its search function. The data stored which is found in the register 16 comprises name and address information for the group eirele of

addresses that is within the territory ~~which is covered by an~~
~~the agreed to service provided by via the~~ service unit 2. If
~~any electronic addresses ing capabilities are~~ found for the
intended recipients of the data, electronic transmission in
~~question during the searching this is~~ selected with
priorityizing given to obtaining a of the connection to via
the addressable unit 28 ~~and/or, if not available, then to the~~
connection thereafter via e-mail or, if also not available,
~~and finally by fax.~~ If any of these capabilities are
available, the service unit 2 produces, from the ~~quantity of~~
data received from the control device 9, an invoice for the
electronic distribution ~~which has been decided upon.~~ The
transmitted above-mentioned data is typically supplemented
with additional by already entered data from the sender for
printing out a complete invoice having with the sender's logo,
etc. In addition, ~~it is assumed that text may will be~~ included
which indicates provides information to the effect that the
communication is the sole corresponds to the sending of an
original invoice and that there will be no delivery by post.

[0036] As noted above, electronic transmission of the data
may only A precondition for this operation being able to be
carried out when is that an electronic address for the
intended recipient in question is found by the search. When
As, ~~if such an address is found the case,~~ the electronically
transmitted invoice is to replaces the invoice ordinarily sent
via the postal service, and the control device ensures that no
data is supplied to the printer 8 so that no postal delivery
may takes place. However, when if no electronic address is
found by the search, the data ~~quantity is~~ returned to the
control device for forwarding to the printer 8. An invoice is
~~The document thus produced that is~~ handled in the normal way
for postal delivery. Also, Finally a report is sent from the
service unit 2 to the sender's accounting system 7 which
indicates stating that the invoice has been sent and the which
communication medium ~~was~~ used.

[0037] ~~The~~ This use of the method of the invention, using the control device and the service unit, is described here given as an example with reference to a of the use for debiting operation. ~~There is, h~~However, the method of the invention may also no reason why it cannot be used for other correspondence such as , for example for follow-up communications after measures to the debiting, such as reminders and dunning letters. Further, the method of the invention ~~However, it can~~ also be used for other correspondence where the sender cannot immediately find the available ~~which distribution paths are available and where~~ electronic transmission is preferable to the postal service.

[0038] ~~Also W~~within the scope of the invention, ~~it is also the case that~~ the operation of control device 9 can be extended to include additional functions. ~~An example of such a function is that it is equipped for the programming of particular functions.~~ ~~For example, it is possible for the printer 8 may only to be used temporarily for a given certain function, for example invoicing, and otherwise to have a more general uses.~~ It For this it is therefore desirable expedient for there to include be a program in the control device which is activated when so that the above-described mentioned function of the control unit is to can be put into effect, that is for alternative production of a printed communication or an electronic communication sent via the service unit 2. ~~When the this program is not active, ated the printer is connected directly to the server or other device in the sender's unit for normal printer applications.~~ Moreover, when If, however, the above-described mentioned program is put into effect, this can also comprise the above-mentioned supplementary data may be included for creating a document in those instances when with a it is preferred to transmit the company logo or other information that is to be for printed directly ing out by the printer instead of using pre-printed header d paper or other forms. ~~As mentioned, it is assumed that s~~Such supplementary data may will be able to be entered

in the service unit but may alternatively ~~it can also be found~~ in a data program for activating ~~on of the printer by means of~~ the control device. Activation of the control device ~~will also~~ activates ~~mean that the above-mentioned reporting function and~~ the updating of the accounting system 7 ~~are maintained in the event of invoicing and other accounting measures.~~

[0039] The Aactivation of the programs ~~which it is wished~~ to be used by in the sender's unit may instead ~~can of course be~~ carried out by a command entered via, for example, the computer 4 or via a keyboard connected directly to the control device. Alternatively, ~~Another way is to connect in a diskette or CD-ROM containing a the program may be connected in~~ question. A further alternative possibility ~~which is also~~ envisaged, is to provide the control device, or a device connected to the control device, ~~this with a card reader.~~ A ~~Using cards from which the program can be read directly from~~ off the cards or activated from a memory, ~~the required function can be ensured by reading the relevant cards.~~ The cards can be clearly marked so that no errors occur, which is ~~important~~ important in connection with accounting. The cards can also be distributed only to authorized personnel, so that misuse, such as ~~for example~~ fraudulent debiting, can be prevented.

[0040] Figure 2 shows, in greater detail, how received correspondence is ~~can be handled~~ according to the method of the invention using in an internal system 35 located on the premises of the recipient, ~~{shown between and to the left of the dotted lines}~~. Above the upper dotted line ~~there are the~~ are shown distribution methods 25-28 which correspond to those ~~as shown in Figure 1 and which represent possible here~~ symbolize the paths by which for the correspondence may arrive ~~at coming to the system 35.~~ Below the lower dotted line, are the same distribution methods 25-28 are shown but here represent possible symbolizing the paths for outgoing ~~correspondence, which is occasioned by the respective incoming~~ correspondence. To the right of the dotted vertical line is

shown the service unit 2. ~~The unit 1~~ for outgoing correspondence. ~~is indicated by a box outlined by dotted lines.~~ It is ~~can be~~ assumed that most of the users of the method and the system of the invention will have the need to be able to both ~~to~~ send and receive correspondence. Here, separate internal systems are described for these functions but, in practice, both functions may ~~it can be expected that they will be~~ integrated ~~with each other~~ to form in a common ~~complete correspondence unit which can be designated as 1,35.~~

[0041] The devices incorporated in the internal system 35 ~~include~~ ~~can be defined in the following way:~~ a sorting station 36 to which postal correspondence 25, fax messages 26 and e-mails 27 are directed. The incoming material is then sorted, which is typically ~~can be assumed to be~~ carried out manually. ~~into mail that is to be~~ The incoming material is then delivered processed by an some employee, see the box at station 37 or , and mail where the data it contains can be entered via, for example, a computer into a server 38 to be stored for the storage of data for processing internally. The Such data can, for example, be information from incoming invoices which is recorded manually. The Such data can also arrive at the server 38 from an employees station-box 37.

[0042] Electronically addressable data , box 28, ~~is typically is assumed to be entered directly into the server for data-processing directly, without passing through going via the sorting station 36. As indicated by the path arrow 40,~~ ~~it is assumed that the server 38 is typically connected to the unit 1 for the production and dispatch of correspondence, as shown ef. the situation in fFigure 1. It is therefore possible for the functions of the servers functions for 6 and 38 to be located be processed and stored in the same internal system.~~

[0043] The above operations are ~~What has been described with respect to so far concerns the purely internal handling.~~ If, however, the service unit 2 is also used for handling incoming data, the sorting station 36 is also ~~to be~~ connected to the service unit 2, either directly or via a scanner 41.

~~Electronically~~ ~~At least to a certain extent~~ addressable messages are ~~thereby also~~ directly delivered ~~taken via the~~ distribution path 28 to the service unit 2 for transmission ~~via this~~ to the server. Employees may, ~~box 37,~~ are also input messages either directly ~~connected to the service unit~~ ~~directly or,~~ possibly, also via a scanner. The service unit 2 is preferably arranged for such data processing so that, at least to a certain extent, scanner messages can be analysed (OCR function) for the production of, for example, sender identification for further automatic data processing ~~where such is possible.~~ The ~~When such data so is produced it is~~ transmitted to the correspondence system 1,35 for registration.

[0044] ~~For~~ ~~t~~The distribution paths for outgoing correspondence, shown by see the lower boxes 25-28, operate in the manner described above ~~it is the case that what was stated in connection with the description of Figure 1 applies.~~ As in ~~It is assumed, as for the previous example, that~~ correspondence to be sent via the postal services is prepared internally within the company via a combination of the control device 9 and the printer 8. In addition, ~~it can be assumed that a fax machine 26 is available as are and also sending capabilities for sending e-mail 27 and, possibly, also addressable transmission capabilities 28.~~ ~~It can therefore be expected that the e~~Employees may also, ~~box 37,~~ often send their correspondence via one of the above-mentioned distribution paths without using ~~making use of the service unit.~~ However, ~~if it is wished to use the service unit may,~~ instead, be used in the manner way ~~described above for the selection of the distribution path using,~~ ~~this requires a direct connection to the service unit or a connection via a scanner.~~ The server 38 ~~is also typically has assumed to have a bi-directional connection with the service unit 2, suitably as described above, in the first example via a control unit such as the control unit 9.~~

[0045] Data ~~can~~ thus arrives at the service unit 2 from various sources: (1) from a system 28 when the data is an ~~for~~ addressable electronic messages, (2) from the sorting station 36 when the data is entered either directly or via a scanner, (3) from entry by an ~~the employee, box at~~ station 37, and (4) from the server 38 either directly or via a control device. For data arriving from the sorting station 36 and/or from the employee, or from the server 38 and then via a control unit, ~~the task of the service unit performs is to carry out the~~ above-described search operation and implements distribution in the manner ~~way~~ described in connection with ~~f~~Figure 1.

[0046] ~~Several benefits are gained by means of t~~The method and the system of ~~according to the invention. We have already pointed out the ability to~~ selects the most advantageous distribution path in a simple manner ~~way~~ by making use of an automatic process controlled by a ~~the~~ separate database equipped with search functions for finding addresses in a comprehensive address directory. The automatic ~~This~~ handling of data ~~can be expected to~~ provides the impetus for the user's ~~network of~~ contacts to change over to electronic communication to create ~~, whereby an even larger group of users by circle is created within which this rational means of communication is~~ used regularly.

[0047] The ~~It should be added that the use of the service unit for distribution, both for the internally initiated distribution and for the distribution initiated by the incoming correspondence, can provide~~ ~~constitute~~ a reason for transferring additional services to the database. ~~By means of t~~The channels of communication which are set up can improve, ~~it can be expedient to carry out book-keeping operations by means of the organization of the database.~~ ~~, which particularly~~Particularly, for smaller companies, the method of the invention may ~~can~~ result in lower handling costs, greater security and reduced need for personnel than with corresponding internal financial handling.

[0048] The above description uses above ~~is based on the fact that the printer 8 which is connected to for the printing out of documents which are to be sent by post is situated in connection with the sender unit 1 rather than being closely connected to the service unit 2. The control device 9 can thereby operate such in such a way that the service unit only handles electronic distribution of the computerised information, whereas while on the other hand information that which is to be sent by post is handled by the sender unit's printer 8,~~ so that a document is produced which can be handed to the postal services on the part of the sender unit. This ~~can be a suitable embodiment of the invention is,~~ particularly suitable if there is a large quantity of document transmissions that are to be sent in document form via post or in another some other way, such as by courier, for which electronic addressing is not applicable. For example, the addressees ~~concerned~~ may not have fax or an e-mail address or may require the consignments can largely concern original copies of documents.

[0049] Within the scope of the invention, ~~the system procedure can, however, be such that one or more printers may be are~~ connected to the service unit, so that the control device or other control function connected to the service unit activates the connected printer to for the print ing out of the documents when a for which search ing in the address directory of the service unit finds reveals that there is no address for electronic distribution available. The document is ~~can then be~~ processed for forwarding as a service within the service unit.

[0050] This ~~can be the most suitable embodiment is also suitable~~ when it is desired not wished to not process some documents consignments within the sender unit. The Of course data for the document consignments which are not processed within the user unit are also must be reported to the relevant function address in the same manner.

[0051] Although the invention herein has been described with reference to particular embodiments, it is to be understood that these embodiments are merely illustrative of the principles and applications of the present invention. It is therefore to be understood that numerous modifications may be made to the illustrative embodiments and that other arrangements may be devised without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention as defined by the appended claims.

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